

Contributions

LOVE OF THE CHURCH

J. L. GILLIN

Recently there appeared in the *Independent* an article by Wm. W. McLane, D. D., on the "Love of the Church." I desire to quote some from it and comment somewhat. The author of that article well says that we ought to love the church, no matter what may be her faults, no matter what is the character of some of her members. But in this article he says, "There are Christian men now, however, who seem to have lost their love for the visible, actual church of earth. They speak of the church in tones and terms of condemnation. They lay upon the church not only her own guilt and that of her members but also the guilt of the wicked world so far at least as that guilt pertains to unrighteousness, social customs and unjust civil laws." Of course, I cannot be certain to whom this writer refers, but he at least refers to the social teachers of today, like Albion W. Small, Prof. G. D. Herron and others, who thus lay upon the church the guilt of the social wrongs of our day. This writer claims these charges are proof that these men do not love the church. Is that true? No man is a true lover of a man or institution who defends their sins. These social teachers are not blaming the church of today because the church of the past did not right the social wrongs, but because the church of today is not making the effort it should to make right the wrongs of our social system. That a portion of the men in the church are not making the proper effort to correct these social abuses is witnessed by the attitude of this same Dr. McLane and others of like spirit. What the church needs today is what she has needed in every age, not defense of her sins, or of her neglect to hear the call of new duties, but a stirring of her up to progress, to listen to her conscience calling her to new lines of activity for Christ.

This author says again, "Thru-out her history the Christian church has been a leading light, a voice of truth, a formative force guiding, teaching and moulding men to better things. The church has not been perfect in teaching or in practice, but that is because she has been composed of unperfect men and has had her place in a wicked world. But the church has made men and the world better. The church is entitled to faith and love. Unwise criticism and unjust condemnation of her will only issue in lessening her power and in alienating men from the one institution which is men's chief hope."

Surely no one denies that the church has done all that the doctor claims. That is not the question. It is, "Is the church

of today doing the best it can to promote civic and social righteousness?" The ideas of the past will not do for this age. Individual righteousness must be had, but upon the conscience of the church in this age has been put the burden of laboring for civic and social righteousness also.

Yes, the church is entitled to faith and love, but not faith in a conservatism which will not move on to new duties, nor love for stubborn resistance to God's call to stand for righteousness in industry, the city and the state. That is not the kind of faith and love the Hebrew prophets manifested towards the church in their days. It is also a question of much debate, whether the criticisms of our leading social teachers are unwise, and their condemnation of the church's refusal to put Christ into their industry and politics and society is unjust. There is an increasing number of people who believe they are neither unwise nor unjust. But the stubbornness of some men to face facts, to acknowledge conditions existing in society, and indifference even in the church will do the very thing this man fears,—“lessen her power and alienate men from the one institution which is men's chief hope.” The church should speak the first word in condemnation of these evils in society, this false self-ease within her borders. By so doing she would not only do her duty, but go far towards winning those whom these wrong conditions oppress.

He further says, "That there are customs which need to be corrected, wrongs which need to be righted and evils which need to be eradicated, no Christian man can deny. But let not the church be blamed for that for which she is not responsible." The church is not blamed for the fact that these wrongs have not been righted in a former age, but because she is refusing, thru the influence of such men as the author quoted, to do her part in righting them in this age. There is the condemnation. The church is not to be condemned because the members in a former day did not see the evils that would result from the private ownership of land, but because they today shut their eyes to the fact of these evils and refuse to try to correct them. The church should not be condemned, and is not by our social teachers, because she did not see in a former day that "the introduction of steam would issue in separating capitalists and laborers into antagonists rather than uniting them in a partnership," nor because she failed to foresee that "the street railway company would become a foreign syndicate owning and controlling streets of cities where the members of the syndicate have no citizenship."

No, no, but the church should be condemned if today seeing these things, she does not lift up her voice against them

and contribute her strength to the solution of the vexed problems. That is what calls down the condemnatory words of our social reformers,—the obstinacy of some members of the church in the face of tremendous facts which call it to battle against organized wrong. If the competitive system of industry is wrong the church should herald the fact, and exert herself to remedy it. And the church will never be aided ultimately by those who fear that those who point out the church's failure and weaknesses are her enemies, for oftentimes they are the heralds of a new liberty, the prophets of a new order of society and love the church best. At least we should learn that from the history of the past. No stauncher friends of the righteousness of God and the true religion of God have ever been found than the prophets when they thundered against the social wrongs of their times and kingdoms; than Jesus, when he hurled the most scorching invectives of holy wrath against the sins of the church of His day; than Wilberforce, Wm. Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips and Whittier when they anathematized slavery while pulpits north as well as south defended the horrible institution of slavery; than John G. Wooley in his terrible battle against the saloon in church, politics and government. Yes, love the church, but love her intelligently.

HIS BEST SERMONS

C. H. WETHERBE

The *London Christian* tells of a minister in England, who, in his farewell sermon as pastor of a certain church, uttered the following words: "Among the many lessons I have learned while here I would like to mention one, because it is a lesson that more than myself would do well to take to heart. I preached all manner of sermons and watched their effect. Some were nothing more than an aping after literary productions; some were dry essays; some were, as near as I could produce them, pure, gospel discourses, containing only the old and the new message. These last were the most effective, the most popular, and the ones that reached the heart. I have discovered that the unadulterated gospel of Jesus Christ is the message which men want to hear, and is the message that brings water to the thirsty soul. I shall, therefore, remember with gratitude the place that has been more than college to me and has done more to equip me for the work of the ministry than the most extended college curriculum." This minister experimented in different sorts of sermons, and he found that all but the true gospel ones were comparatively failures. He found that he could not improve the old gospel. He saw that none but gospel sermons could so effect